★ ★ ★ ZOHRAN MAMDANI'S PATH TO VICTORY — P6 ★ ★ ★

THE INDYPENDENT

#295 MAY/JUNE 2025

ESTEBAN JIMENEZ

FIGHT THE BULLY

AS TRUMP OVERREACHES, RESISTANCE 2.0 GROWS STRONGER

★ ★ ★ COVERAGE STARTS PAGE 10 ★ ★ ★

THE INDYPENDENT

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MAY 03–OCT 25 • 4PM–12AM
QUEENS NIGHT MARKET
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NEW YORK HALL OF SCIENCE
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Flushing Meadows-Corona Park
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FRI MAY 16 • 6PM–7:30PM • FREE
SOLO PIANO CONCERT: KIYOKO LAYNE AND MARCUS PERSIANI
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PELHAM FRITZ RECREATION CENTER: MULTI-USE ROOM A
18 Mount Morris Park West
MNHTN

SAT MAY 17 • 3:30PM DOORS • $28.52
THEATRE: *ESTO NO TIENE NOMBRE*
A powerful one-woman show by Denice Frohman, chronicling the oral histories of Latina lesbian elders. Directed by Alex Torra and curated by Jacqueline Woodson, the performance is inspired by the magazine *Esto No Tiene Nombre* and archival interviews from the "I See My Light Shining" initiative.
TEATRO LATEA @ THE CLEMENTE
107 Suffolk St.
MNHTN

THU MAY 22 • 6:30PM–8PM • FREE
CBH TALK | FIVE YEARS AFTER GEORGE FLOYD: THE FIGHT TODAY
A powerful conversation marking the fifth anniversary of George Floyd's murder, featuring Yale professor Elizabeth Hinton, NYC Council member Chi Ossé and historian Jeanne Theoharis. Together, they examine the 2020 protests, the backlash, and the continuing struggle against racist policing and systemic injustice.
CENTER FOR BROOKLYN HISTORY
128 Pierrepont St.
BKLYN

FRI MAY 30 • 7PM • $19.50
FILM: *HEIGHTENED SCRUTINY*
New York Premiere of this powerful documentary, first debuted at Sundance, following Queens-based ACLU lawyer Chase Strangio as he fights anti-trans legislation across the United States. Directed by Sam Feder. Extended Q&A with the filmmaker to follow. Part of the NewFest Pride Summer Film Series, showcasing queer-centered narrative films from May 29–June 2. Check out the full lineup and get tickets at newfest.org/pride
SVA THEATRE
333 W 23rd St.
MNHTN

MON JUN 2 • 6:30PM–8:30PM • FREE
9TH ANNUAL JOSÉ MUÑOZ AWARD HONORING ANGELA Y. DAVIS
CLAGS honors Angela Y. Davis, scholar and lifelong civil-rights activist, prison abolitionist, feminist, and renowned Professor of the History of Consciousness and Feminist Studies. Reserve your seat by going to gc.cuny.edu/events/annual-jose-munoz-award-angela-y-davis.
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY
365 Fifth Ave.
MNHTN

MON JUN 9 • 7PM–8:30 PM • FREE
OPERA: THE METROPOLITAN'S SUMMER RECITAL
An annual summer tradition, the Metropolitan Opera's popular concert series in New York City parks continues with a free outdoor recital series at SummerStage. Three of today's most exciting young stars – Tessa McQueen, Hannah Jones, and Sunghoon Han – come together for an effervescent evening of favorite arias, duets and ensembles accompanied by pianist Mariam Bombrun.
JACKIE ROBINSON PARK
Bradhurst Avenue & W 15th St.
MNHTN

MON JUN 9–SUN AUG 24 • FREE & TICKETED
BRIC CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Brooklyn's long awaited outdoor festival is back – bringing music, dance, film and more to Prospect Park. Check out bricartsmedia.org/celebrate-brooklyn/ to find the full line up of the summer!
LENA HORNE BANDSHELL
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BKLYN

SAT JUN 21 • 10AM–3PM • FREE
JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION AT HARLEM GROWN
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HARLEM GROWN - 134TH ST. FARM
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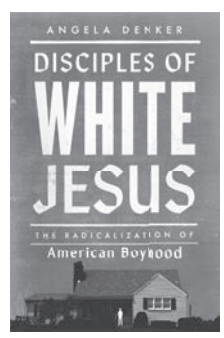

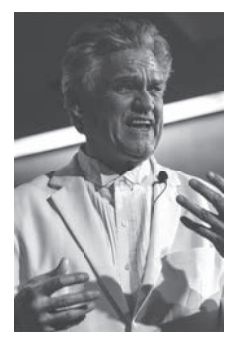

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AS CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS DWINDLE, QUEER LIBERATION MARCHES ON

NO TURNING BACK

LARRY HERTZ

By Eva Moschitto

The NYC Pride March began in 1970, one year after the Stonewall uprising that launched the gay rights movement. The annual Pride March, on the last Sunday in June, is dotted with the floats of corporate sponsors and attracts hundreds of thousands of onlookers. Heritage of Pride, the organization that runs it, is now a 501(c)3 nonprofit with a $4.6 million operating budget, 70% of which goes toward producing Pride month events, spokesperson Kevin Kilbride told *The Indypendent* in an email.

The Reclaim Pride Coalition was founded in the spring of 2019 by people who felt NYC Pride was marginalizing more radical members of the LGBTQ+ community. They were uncomfortable with NYC Pride's cozy ties with corporate sponsors and the city police department, whose raids on gay bars in Greenwich Village sparked the 1969 Stonewall uprising. Since 2019, Reclaim Pride's Queer Liberation March has attracted tens of thousands marchers each year, according to organizers.

With the LGBTQ+ community under withering assault from the Trump administration, the two groups will once again march on the same day this year, Sunday, June 29. The NYC Pride March will travel its traditional route down Fifth Avenue, west on Christopher Street, and then up Seventh Avenue to West 15th Street. The Queer Liberation March will assemble at 11 a.m. at the NYC AIDS Memorial in St. Vincent's Triangle Park and will march north to Columbus Circle, dispersing into Central Park.

NYC Pride, like various other Pride celebrations around the country, is re-evaluating its budget as corporations reduce or revoke the financial support they previously provided.

"At this point, we are anticipating a loss of roughly $350,000 in corporate support, which means we may need to scale down the footprint of our Pride month events and year-round programming. It also impacts our ability to award grants to local queer nonprofits through our 'Pride Gives Back' grant program," Kilbride said.

He declined to name companies that had revoked sponsorship. "Many of them are longtime partners, and we're honoring that history as we work to keep them at the table in the spirit of showing up for the LGBTQIA+ community down the line," he said.

According to Kilbride, corporations cited economic concerns regarding tariffs and fear of retaliation as reasons why they revoked their support.

"We've been heartened to see some partners provide funding without any marketing behind it," he noted. "With our current funding model, corporate partners remain essential for us to keep our events free and accessible to the entire LGBTQIA+ community in New York City and beyond," he said.

■ ■ ■

The Queer Liberation March is planned and executed by a fully volunteer staff and relies on donations from foundations and individuals to cover operating costs.

"We're back to basics, in terms of our organizing," Reclaim Pride cofounder Jay W. Walker said. "We're a march; we're not a parade."

For safety, the march relies on trained community marshals. It has never accepted a police presence or barricades. "We do not want a police presence at our march and for the most part, [the NYPD] goes along with that," Walker said. "We are not a welcoming space for police to march armed, in uniform," referring to a practice NYC Pride discontinued in 2021 after intense criticism.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people were roughly six times more likely to be stopped by police in a public space, a 2021 study by the University of California at Los Angeles law school's Williams Institute estimated (the study did not survey transgender people).

This year's theme for the Queer Liberation March will be "Resist! Reclaim! Rejoice!"

"It would be impossible to encapsulate the overwhelming level of attacks on LGBTQ2S+ communities happening in the United States and around the world right now, as well as just to human beings — to human rights and civil rights both here and abroad," Walker stressed. "We have to resist what's happening now so that we can reclaim our freedoms and our liberty, so that at the end of this all, we'll be able to rejoice."

The theme in 2022, the year the Supreme Court ruled that states could outlaw abortion, was "For Trans and BIPoC Freedom, Reproductive Justice, and Bodily Autonomy." In 2024, it was "For Black, Brown, Queer, Trans, Gender Nonconforming, and Nonbinary Youth, and Against War and Genocide."

Those issues "are always going to be a part of it, because [they] are ongoing," Walker noted.

This year's theme was decided through several town hall meetings that were largely unpublicized. "We didn't want this to be a media event," Walker said. "We wanted this to be a space where people could have unguarded conversations [about] how they felt our collective communities needed to respond to this."

Reclaim Pride was founded during the first Trump administration. Walker says all the hard work done since then is paying off now.

"Those four years gave us some architecture, some infrastructure, to start with," he said. By this year, "We had the connections between organizations, between individuals, the friendships, the comradery. … in many ways, we are in a better position to resist, because all of that connective tissue is already there."

The theme for this year's NYC Pride March is "Rise Up: Pride in Protest," in honor of the first Pride march in 1970. "We felt it was necessary to help meet this volatile political moment, serving as a call to action for our community and allies to join us and march in defiant celebration, advocacy and solidarity," Kilbride said.

To Walker, the moment is more than volatile; it's "a tipping point."

"The stressors that this global authoritarian fascist movement is putting on ordinary people all over the globe — there's going to be a reaction," he said. "There is a societal hunger in this country to stand up. The Queer Liberation March is going to be a part of that larger movement of coordinated protests happening all over the country."

OUT & PROUD: *An estimated 45,000 people took to the streets for the inaugural Queer Liberation March in 2019. A big turnout is expected again this year.*

GAZA LOOMS LARGE OVER SUNSET PARK CITY COUNCIL RACE

DSA'S ALEXA AVILÉS TARGETED BY PRO-ISRAEL PAC

SUE BRISK

FOR THE MANY: *Alexa Avilés is one of two socialists who currently serves on City Council.*

By Theodore Hamm

My opponent told me last year that 'people should just leave Gaza,'" says City Councilmember Alexa Avilés, who represents Sunset Park and Red Hook. "I was shocked," Avilés tells *The Indypendent*.

Neither challenger Ling Ye nor her campaign team responded to *The Indy*'s multiple requests for comment. But an extremist position on Gaza corresponds with Ye's support from numerous pro-Israel hawks.

Avilés' race in District 38 resembles the contest in the neighboring council district of Park Slope-Kensington, which is also witnessing a clash over the genocide in Gaza. Solidarity PAC — a pro-Israel group — is backing challenger Maya Kornberg against incumbent Shahana Hanif in District 39. The same PAC endorsed Ye's campaign against Avilés, one of two democratic socialists in the city council.

Ye, who immigrated from China at age 14, spent the last two years working as a senior field representative for Rep. Dan Goldman, a consistent opponent of a ceasefire in Gaza. As of late April, Goldman has yet to formally endorse Ye.

But in addition to receiving over $9,000 from Solidarity PAC as of early March, Ye's campaign filings show that she has collected over $6,000 from the PAC's leading contributors. The city's 8–1 matching funds policy means that she has hauled in more than $50,000 from pro-Israel donors.

Unlike Park Slope or Kensington, neither Sunset Park nor Red Hook has large numbers of Jewish or Muslim voters who are paying especially close attention to the Gaza crisis. Sunset Park retains a small number of Palestinian Americans (whereas many other former residents moved to Bay Ridge). Avilés' position on Gaza — that "Palestinians deserve equality and liberation" and that "the violence on all sides must end" — is likely in sync with most liberal voters in the district.

Closer to home, Avilés says that in her first four years in office, she has paid close attention to issues including the need for upgrades to NYCHA housing in Red Hook and improved public parks throughout the district.

Avilés cites the renovated playground at Fourth Avenue and 59th Street in Sunset Park as just one success, calling it now "a bustling place."

"We've got four other locations under renovation, many with $8–10 million each in city funds that I secured," she says.

In Red Hook, according to Avilés, her office has worked closely with NYCHA residents, addressing area concerns including trucks idling near parks and the need for environmental remediation.

Ye echoes the pro-NYPD views of Asian elected officials from South Brooklyn. She recently posted a photo of a van with a broken window on X, claiming that the random incident proved that Avilés' support for defunding the police was wrong. Avilés, meanwhile, continues to support reallocating funds from what she calls the "bloated" NYPD budget to mental health interventions. "If we are serious about crime, then we seriously need to invest differently," the council member told *BK Reader*.

In early April, Avilés and local State Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes joined their DSA comrade Zohran Mamdani at a pro-rent freeze rally in Sunset Park. The event was organized by CAAAV Voice, a long-standing working-class Asian activist organization, with moderators translating speeches for both Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking attendees. Ye's website makes no mention of the rent hikes that the Adams administration has imposed on the city's rent-stabilized tenants over the last three years.

Avilés currently chairs the city council's Committee on Immigration, which oversees City policies regarding ICE enforcement. "We will resist participating in mass deportation," Avilés declared at a recent CUNY Graduate Center event. Ye's platform makes no reference to ICE.

In early April, many voters in the district received a hand-addressed envelope from Ye's campaign. In it was a printed letter from Ye's mother describing her understandable pride in her daughter's accomplishments. Yet while the missive assured voters that Ye would "stand up for our residents," it made no mention of ICE, a rent freeze or Gaza.

ZOHRAN MAMDANI'S PATH TO VICTORY

HE'S RUNNING SECOND TO ANDREW CUOMO. CAN HE PULL OFF A HISTORIC UPSET?

KARA MCCURDY

ON THE MOVE: *Zohran Mamdani takes the stage at a campaign rally.*

By John Tarleton

Zohran Mamdani has been on a roll since he launched his longshot mayoral campaign.

Relying on small donors, the 33-year-old socialist state legislator from Queens fundraised the maximum amount allowed by the city's campaign finance system faster than any candidate in history. His campaign began door-to-door canvassing in December, months before other candidates. His witty, always-on-message videos have conveyed his plans for making the city affordable to hundreds of thousands of viewers on social media. Polls have shown Mamdani steadily rising from low single digits to roughly 20%, good enough for second place in a crowded field.

"Cuomo's campaign has been one disaster after another," Andrew Epstein, a Mamdani campaign spokesperson, told The Indypendent. "He basically has one way to go, which is down."

In 2021, around a quarter of New York City's nearly 4 million registered Democrats voted in the mayoral primary won by Eric Adams. Many of those were "triple primes" (voters who have cast ballots in the last three Democratic primaries) who campaigns pursue because they reliably vote. The triple primes skew toward being older and more middle-class, which impacts how most candidates campaign. Mamdani's campaign is trying to galvanize the other 74% of the voters — who are rarely wooed by mayoral candidates.

With the clock ticking as the June 24 Democratic primary approaches and many voters starting to tune in to the race, Mamdani trails former governor Andrew Cuomo by roughly 20 points. But he also has some unique advantages that give him a chance of pulling off a historic upset. This will require a massive turnout by several political constituencies that have previously been ignored in mayoral elections.

YOUTH QUAKE

According to the New York City Campaign Finance Board, voter turnout among those aged 18 to 29 (10.6% to 17.9%) and 30 to 39 (15.3% to 21.7%) increased by the largest percentage of an age group from the 2013 to 2021 Democratic primary for mayor. Mamdani is leading in all the polls with voters under 35. With his ubiquitous social media presence, he's hoping to inspire them to turn out in historically large numbers.

SOUTH ASIAN & MUSLIM VOTERS

Mamdani is the first major South Asian or Muslim candidate for mayor. There are an estimated 350,000 Muslim New Yorkers registered to vote. Only 12% voted in 2021. Mamdani has been a regular at mosques and temples. He's already respected in the South Asian community for joining a 15-day hunger strike by taxi drivers in 2021 that won $450 million in debt relief for the embattled cabbies. Mamdani has built on that goodwill during his mayoral run, according to Jaslin Kaur, the daughter of a taxi driver and a 2021 City Council candidate in an Eastern Queens district with a sizable South Asian population.

"His volunteers are out there wanting to have in-language conversations with people," Kaur told The Indypendent. "And making those introductions makes people feel like they're connected to the campaign, [while] Cuomo has felt very far away."

RENT-STABILIZED TENANTS

No matter how many young voters back Mamdani, he also needs older voters too. Two of his main campaign promises — a four-year rent freeze for the city's 2.4 million rent-stabilized tenants and free and fast buses — could help. Rent-stabilized tenants tend to be older and are disproportionately Black and Latino. The same with elderly bus riders who find buses easier to enter and exit than subway stations. Will enough older voters get the word in time to change their mind?

"Canvassed two large rent-stabilized buildings in the Bronx. Some had heard of Zohran. Most hadn't. All were excited about his platform," Mamdani supporter Lawrence Wang tweeted on May 10. "But the real kicker? None had been canvassed prior to today. The Bronx is ready for Zoh-mentum. We just need to seize the opportunity."

Here are some factors that could help Mamdani make a strong final push.

THE DSA DIFFERENCE

Mamdani's campaign has nearly 20,000 volunteers. It knocked on its 400,000th door on May 10 and is distributing campaign materials in multiple languages. Epstein projects volunteers will ultimately knock on 1.5 million doors.

The New York City chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America is the nucleus of Mamdani's campaign. Since 2018, NYC-DSA endorsed candidates, having wrested nine state legislative seats and a pair of City Council seats from machine Democrats. While the media focuses on the outcomes of individual races to gauge DSA's standing, years of running campaigns has built a large cadre of experienced canvassers and earned the trust of its supporters.

"There's a lot of doors I've knocked on for at least four out of the past six years. It doesn't feel like you have to try so hard to convince them," says

Continued on page 14

MEDIA & THE MAYORAL RACE

GARY MARTIN

By Theodore Hamm

Four years ago, a mid-April opinion poll found that only 24% of likely voters in the 2021 primary intended to rank Eric Adams first or second, placing him well behind frontrunner Andrew Yang's 38%. Kathryn Garcia tallied only 13% in the top two slots, and just two months before voting commenced, she had very low name recognition.

The late June results, of course, showed that Adams finished first or second on 61% of ballots, with Garcia reaching nearly 40%. The latter's strength in later rounds of the ranked-choice voting process enabled her to ultimately finish only one percentage point behind Adams.

There is little doubt that the crime-obsessed *New York Post* helped drive Adams' surge, while the enthusiastic backing of *The New York Times* made technocrat Garcia a viable challenger. It appears quite unlikely that history will repeat itself in this year's primary.

Current Democratic frontrunner Andrew Cuomo has been getting no love whatsoever from the *Post*. An early March editorial called him the "Biggest Liar in New York," warning readers that the disgraced former governor may "grope you." Later in the month, a second editorial as well as a cover story spotlighted Cuomo's nursing home scandal. Another cover featured his alleged affair with his then-married hatchet woman.

The *Post* has been so relentless in trashing Cuomo that the candidate reportedly has been seeking a meeting with Rupert Murdoch, the tabloid's 94-year-old figurehead. If given the opportunity, Cuomo would surely remind Murdoch that he's been a longtime friend of the 1%.

Many of the local nightly news programs take their cues from the *Post*, which helped Adams' campaign in the June 2021 primary. Cuomo's sleepwalking will not inspire much coverage.

As of the end of April, it's not clear if the *Post* will back any candidate in the Democratic primary. But it will continue to spew bile at the insurgent democratic socialist challenger Zohran Mamdani. In addition to relentless accusations regarding Mamdani's supposed antisemitism, a recent hit piece called the candidate's plan for free buses "something out of the Politburo." Voters alive when the Soviet Union existed may grasp the reference to the Communist Party's directorate. Meanwhile, many of the *Post*'s most fervent readers will continue to enjoy riding the ferry back and forth to Staten Island for — you guessed it — free.

As of now, the *Post* appears to be saving its powder for the general election, which likely will include Mayor Adams running as an independent and Curtis Sliwa as the Republican nominee. There will be candidates running on the Democratic and possibly the Working Families Party lines. Others may enter the fray. Alas, the *Post* will continue to flex its muscles.

THE TIMES BOWS OUT

Last summer, *The New York Times* announced that it would no longer make endorsements in local races. In the outlet's own story about the decision, *The Times*' opinion editor provided no explanation about the move. As mentioned, the editorial board's backing of Garcia nearly made her the mayor. Meanwhile, Manhattan DA Alvin Bragg successfully capitalized on *The Times*' support in a hotly contested 2021 race.

There has been a steady decline in the local coverage found in the "paper of record" in recent years. Once the home of influential commentators including Michael Powell, Jim Dwyer and Bob Herbert, *The Times* is now down to one local columnist, Ginia Bellafante, who writes a weekend entry. In general, the publication is now a "lifestyle" brand, and the grit and grime of New York City politics isn't of much interest in Montclair.

Although she is not a declared candidate for mayor, NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch clearly would get plenty of favorable coverage in *The Times* if she entered the race. Since taking the reins as the fourth NYPD boss in Eric Adams' first term late last year, Tisch has already received a steady stream of flattering profiles. That her 1% lineage explains such attention is not even something *The Times* attempts to deny, with a recent headline referring to Tisch as an "heiress."

If Tisch indeed ends up on the November ballot, *The Times* and the *Post* likely would find common ground. The *Post* recently commended Tisch's "sterling record of successful public service." In 1%-speak, that means "she's ours."

SMALLER OUTLETS SET TO PLAY BIGGER ROLE

In the 2021 Democratic primary, *New York Daily News* endorsed Kathryn Garcia, calling her "whip-smart." The outlet then ranked Adams as a "strong second." The plugs certainly helped both candidates, but not nearly as much as the support of *The New York Times* and the *New York Post*. The *Daily News* seems to be running on fumes these days, and the "editorial board" is basically just Michael Aronson, whose views are generally centrist.

The nonprofit media — led by *Gothamist*/WNYC and *The City* — does not endorse candidates but will provide plenty of scoops over the next two months. The same holds for *Politico*, a for-profit. *Hell Gate* is also a for-profit, but it's not clear if it will endorse anyone. If it does, it's a safe bet that it won't be Andrew Cuomo.

The newly formed New York Editorial Board, which consists of veteran journalists from many of the above outlets, will back a candidate, but it's hard to gauge the influence of its inaugural run.

Schneps Media, meanwhile, is likely a name that only media insiders will recognize. But it wields considerable influence over local coverage across the city.

In 2018, Schneps purchased *The Villager* and *Gay City News*, two long-standing weekly outlets that have subsequently lost their radical edge. One year later, *amNewYork* (*amNY*) joined the Schneps portfolio, giving the chain a citywide daily anchor. A slew of borough-based outlets, including *Bronx Times*, *Brooklyn Paper*, and *Queens Times-Ledger*, lead the roster of over two dozen pub-

Continued on page 14

LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

AFACWA

1199SEIU PRESIDENT DEFEATED FOR RE-ELECTION

George Gresham, president of the 1199SEIU healthcare workers union for 18 years, was solidly defeated for re-election after what his opponents called "disturbing new allegations of financial mismanagement." Yvonne Armstrong, head of the union's long-term care division, ran on the Members First Unity slate and won 69% of the vote to Gresham's 31%. "WE DID IT. THE FUTURE OF 1199 STARTS NOW," Members First posted on Instagram May 4 after the results were announced. Gresham's support collapsed after *Politico* reported in early April that he had spent tens of thousands of dollars from the union's budget on personal expenses, while many members make minimum wage.

SARA NELSON REITERATES CALL FOR GENERAL STRIKE

Association of Flight Attendants President Sara Nelson, whose suggestion about a general strike helped end a government shutdown in 2019, is reiterating that point now. "Nothing, nothing, nothing can move without our labor, and it's time to exercise our power in a united working class," she told an April rally in Montana, part of Sen. Bernie Sanders' "Fighting Oligarchy" tour. "We need to get ready for a general strike." She told *Slate* that striking would be the most effective way to resist Donald Trump's attempt to cancel collective-bargaining rights for 700,000 federal workers. "They're saying to the rest of corporate America: 'Rip up union contracts.' This is the biggest attack in history on the labor movement.

EIGHT STATES WEAKEN CHILD-LABOR LAWS

Eight states, all governed by Republicans, have reduced regulations on child labor in the past two years. Among them are a 2023 Iowa law that relaxed age restrictions on hazardous jobs: 14-year-olds can work in industrial laundries, and state agencies can let 16- and 17-year-olds do demolition, roofing and excavation. Florida and West Virginia similarly loosened their age limits on roofing work last year. Alabama ended its requirement for kids under 16 to get work permits, and Kentucky allowed 12- and 13-year-olds to work for nonprofits. The legislation is "a coordinated effort," Economic Policy Institute analyst Nina Mast told the Illinois Senate Labor Committee last year, led by "business lobbying groups and industry associations that would especially benefit" and "right-wing think tanks and advocacy groups that seek to weaken workers' rights."

READY TO ESCALATE: *To stop Trump, Association of Flight Attendants President Sara Nelson says workers need to start preparing for a general strike.*

MULTIPLE STRIKES ON MAY DAY

May Day saw not just hundreds of anti-Trump protests, but strikes at all ten University of California campuses, at Lockheed Martin factories in Denver and Orlando, and at a New Orleans hospital. In California, more than 57,000 workers with AFSCME Local 3299 and UPTE-Communications Workers Local 9119 staged a one-day strike to protest a hiring freeze the university announced in March. In New Orleans, more than 600 nurses at University Medical Center also staged a one-day strike, their third in the past year. Their National Nurses United local has been negotiating for a first contract for more than a year.

NYC BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

KENT NISHIMURA

MOST MAYORAL CANDIDATES URGE RENT FREEZE

Seven of the Democratic candidates for mayor have urged the city's Rent Guidelines Board (RGB) to freeze rents: Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani, State Sen. Jessica Ramos, former Assemblymember Michael Blake, City Comptroller Brad Lander, City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, State Sen. Zellnor Myrie, and former Comptroller Scott Stringer. The exceptions are Andrew Cuomo and Democrat-turned-independent incumbent Eric Adams, who both argue that a rent freeze would hurt small owners. (Less than one-eighth of the city's rent-stabilized apartments are owned by landlords with fewer than 100 units, according to JustFix.) The RGB, which will set the final guidelines for rent-stabilized apartments in late June, voted April 30 to propose increases of 1.75% to 7.75%. Freezing rents, Cea Weaver of the New York State Tenant Bloc told Gothamist, "is the single most powerful thing the mayor can do to make New York affordable."

REAL ESTATE BANKROLLS CUOMO SUPER PAC

Since former Gov. Andrew Cuomo joined the mayoral race in March, real-estate companies and executives have contributed millions of dollars to his Fix the City super PAC. The $7 million it had raised as of April 30 included $250,000 each from Two Trees Management and Scott Rechler of RXR Realty, $125,000 from Douglas Eisenberg of A&E Real Estate Management, and $50,000 from developer Stephen Ross. Donors to PACs can give much more than the city's $2,100 limit for direct contributions to a candidate's campaign, with the catch that PACs are not supposed to coordinate with the campaign. But in late April, ***Politico*** reported that Cuomo was using a tactic called "redboxing" — posting "messages to voters" on his campaign website that suggested ad strategies PACs could use to target voters 40–55 years old.

FOR SALE: *Andrew Cuomo's super PAC raised $7 million by the end of April. Much of that money has come from wealthy real-estate interests.*

TRUMP & RFK JR CUT 9/11 HEALTH PROGRAM

The Trump regime has ordered the World Trade Center Health Program, which provides treatment for more than 130,000 people with cancer and other diseases related to 9/11 exposure, to stop certifying new patients or approving additional treatment. "We postponed chemotherapy for a firefighter this week, hoping this could be fixed," Dr. David Prezant told ABC News. "This delay may cost him his life." The order goes along with drastic cuts at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, which administers the program: On May 2, Trump and Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. fired 16 more medical staffers.

FIRST WORLD PROBLEMS

The board of a 96-story luxury condo building at 432 Park Ave. is suing the developer, accusing it of concealing the structural dangers of some 1,900 cracks in the building's façade. The suit, filed in late April against the CIM Group and others, charges that the developer ignored warnings that the white concrete mix being used was not strong enough to support a building that tall. "This matter extends beyond negligence into an alleged calculated scheme, driven by greed," Terrence Oved, a lawyer for the condo board, told *The New York Times*.

VETERANS HOSPITALS FACE MASSIVE LAYOFFS

PLAN TO LAY OFF 83,000 VA WORKERS COULD UNRAVEL VETS' HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, ACCELERATE PRIVATIZATION

ASH MARINACCIO

A PLACE TO HEAL: *The Manhattan VA Hospital at First Avenue and 23rd Street.*

By Luce Miyar-Mullan & John Tarleton

When Army veteran Jose Vasquez received a pancreatic cancer diagnosis earlier this year, he turned to the VA Hospital on Manhattan's East Side for a life-saving operation. "Basically a whole rearrangement of my gastrointestinal system in order to cut out the cancerous tumor," Vasquez told *The Indypendent*.

Vasquez recently transferred to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center for his chemotherapy. According to Vasquez, while he was undergoing surgery at his VA hospital there was a noticeable shortage of staff. "I could just tell the nurses were spread pretty thin. … They have so many patients that they have to take care of. A lot of the vets that are being taken care of on the ward have multiple issues going on. Some of them are just fresh out of surgery. [They] have all kinds of [issues] … diabetes, high blood pressure, you name it."

There are currently three VA hospitals in New York City — in the Bronx, South Brooklyn and on Manhattan's East Side — with 496 beds total and an additional 120 nursing home beds. Staffing shortages are likely to grow worse. In March, a leaked internal VA memo revealed that the Trump administration is planning to lay off as many as 83,000 VA workers this year as part of efforts to shrink the government workforce being led by Elon Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

The move to slash the VA workforce comes just three years after Congress passed the PACT Act, which extended survivor benefits to an estimated 3.5 million veterans of the 1991 Gulf War and various post-9/11 conflicts who suffer from one of more than 20 presumptive disabilities associated with burn-pit exposure. Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange are also covered. It was the largest expansion of veterans benefits in decades.

On April 9, the New York State Nurses Union and a number of veterans groups rallied in front of the Manhattan VA Hospital on East 23rd Street to protest the sweeping cuts.

"They have unleashed an unprecedented and immoral effort to strip nurses and other VA staff of our union rights," said NYSNA President Nancy Hagans. "And we're not gonna let it happen. We will not abandon our patients!"

One young trans veteran described how life-saving treatment came in the form of hormone therapy and gender-affirming care. "In 2014, I called the veteran crisis line and an actual person picked up and walked me through the process of applying for the benefits that I had earned through my service," the veteran said. "I was on the verge of being homeless, and a few weeks later, I found the support that I needed. I started my hormone therapy, and that saved my life."

Eleven years later, it is likely that a caller in crisis will be met with an automated voice message, as the VA's crisis hotline is now severely underfunded and understaffed.

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The United States has been fighting wars almost continuously since its inception and has, to varying degrees, come to the aid of the soldiers who fought those wars. Revolutionary War veterans were the first to receive pensions. After the carnage of the Civil War, the federal government established "soldiers homes." Often located in bucolic rural areas, they provided lifelong medical care and housing for thousands of disabled Union Army veterans.

After World War I, the government began building new veterans hospitals with a focus on rehabilitating veterans and returning them to society. Disparate agencies were consolidated into the Veterans Administration in 1930. With 16 million veterans returning from World War II, the G.I. Bill opened up new opportunities for higher education and home ownership for veterans while the VA's medical system was expanded and modernized and new relationships were established with research universities. This in turn fostered groundbreaking discoveries about cancer, suicide, hypertension, mental health, spinal cord injury and tuberculosis. VA innovations like the cardiac pacemaker and CT scanner benefited not only veterans but the whole world.

Veterans hold a revered place in American culture, and politicians from both major parties have long sought to win their support. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan, a bitter foe of "big government," signed legislation elevating the VA to a cabinet-level agency. Today, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs website, it oversees the nation's largest integrated healthcare network — 1,600 healthcare facilities, including 144 medical centers, and 1,232 outpatient sites serve nine million veterans per year. Over 25% of the VA workforce are veterans themselves.

"Veterans] need staff who know how to take care of [them]," said Veterans For Peace President Susan Schnall, a retired public sector nurse and Vietnam-era veteran who spoke at the April 9 rally. "[Doctors and nurses in the private sector] don't understand, they can't. … They don't have anything to do with these folks who have been overseas … and seen armed struggle and dealt with the after effects."

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FIGHT THE BULLY

THE RESISTANCE TO TRUMP IS STEADILY GROWING. IT MAY YET EXPLODE.

By John Tarleton

When Columbia student protester Mohsen Mahdawi was released from a Vermont jail on April 30 after being detained by ICE for 16 days, he had a message for his tormenters: "To President Trump and his Cabinet, I am not afraid of you."

Standing behind him, his supporters chanted "No fear!"

One day later, on International Workers' Day, people took to the streets in nearly 1,000 towns and cities across the United States to protest for labor and immigrants' rights and to denounce Trump's billionaire-run government.

Action, like courage, can be contagious. Following the April 5 "Hands Off" protests and another Saturday of mass protests on April 19, the May 1 demonstrations marked the third time in less than a month that large numbers of Americans took to the streets in national days of action.

Trump 2.0's rapid blitzkrieg through any institution — public or private — that might oppose him is based on a "flood the zone" strategy that seeks to overwhelm and disorient his political opposition. However, flooding the zone can also make a lot of enemies very quickly. And that's what appears to be happening.

Nationwide days of protest are only one tool of a broad-based opposition that stretches from the grassroots activists to powerful elites in academia, the judiciary and even the financial markets that are repudiating Trump's most disruptive actions. Here are some highlights.

- *The "Fighting Oligarchy" tour led by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) was the first visible sign of large-scale opposition to Trump. It drew 12,000 people in Nampa, Idaho; 20,000 in Salt Lake City; 34,000 in Denver and 36,000 in Los Angeles. By moving quickly, Sanders and AOC have helped frame the resistance to Trump 2.0 in class-based terms, unlike Trump's first term, when Democrats channeled public outrage into Russiagate conspiracy theories. As* The Indypendent *goes to press, House Republican leaders have already dropped their most aggressive plans to slash Medicaid funding due to objections from GOP colleagues who represent swing districts the Fighting Oligarchy tour visited.*

- *Tesla is the linchpin of co-president and world's richest man Elon Musk's $380 billion fortune. Protesters have succeeded in making the car company's brand toxic among affluent liberals who are its customer base. In early April, Tesla announced its first-quarter sales were down 13% from the same time last year, and its first-quarter profits plummeted a staggering 71%.*

- *In Sackets Harbor, NY, one thousand people marched on Trump's deportation czar Tom Homan's summer home in early April after ICE agents detained a Guatemalan mother and her three school-age children. A public letter to ICE by the childrens' school principal Jaime Cook — "I have no other agenda. Please release my students and their mother back to their community" — helped mobilize the tiny village's response. Two days after the march, the mother and her children were released.*

- *On April 16, Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) traveled to El Salvador and refused to leave until the country's Trump-friendly dictator let him meet with Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Maryland father of three U.S.-born children who was abducted by ICE agents in March and flown to a notorious Salvadoran prison without due process. After Van Hollen's headline-grabbing action, several other Democratic members of Congress used their power to make high-profile visits to pro-Palestine students being held in ICE detention, Mahmoud Khalil, Rumeysa Ozturk and Mohsen Mahdawi. After years of Democrats refusing to confront Trump's xenophobia, national polls now show Trump underwater with voters on immigration, his signature issue.*

- *Like most universities, Harvard has bent over backward since October 2023 to appease Zionists who conflate criticism of Israel with antisemitism. All that got Harvard was an April 11 letter from the Trump administration demanding the university place its faculty hiring, its student admission process and its curriculum under government review until at least 2028 or lose billions of dollars in federal research grants. Harvard President Alan Gerber shocked the Trumpies by flatly refusing to give in to their bullying and subsequently sued the administration.*

- *Galvanized by Harvard's stance, hundreds of university presidents signed a letter protesting "unprecedented government overreach and political interference." Meanwhile, the majority of faculty senates at Big 10 conference schools across the Midwest have passed measures calling for a NATO-style self-defense compact in which public universities would pledge to share financial and legal resources if any one of them comes under attack.*

- *If you think Harvard, with its $53*

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DREAMS OF ESCAPE

DAVID HOLLENBACH

By Nicholas Powers

The police watched us. The march leaders chanted, "Tell me what democracy looks like!" We answered, "This is what democracy looks like!"

Ducking under signs and umbrellas, I saw us, the left, grim-faced and determined. The gray sky and rain added a heaviness. I pivoted and noted the absence of Black New Yorkers. Where were we?

I left the march, carried my sign on the A-train, then Brooklyn. A neighbor saw me. He is a tall brotha, rocks a fluorescent work jacket. "Mr. Activist! I saw the protest." We stood on the corner, and I asked why he didn't go. "White people made this problem." He theatrically wiped his hands. "They can fix it."

It's the unofficial-official position of Black America. *They can fix it.* I hear it online. I hear on phone calls. I read it on group chats. I hear it on the stoop and on the corner. *They can fix it.* Right after comes "and I'm getting the fuck out. Why stay? We did what we could. Amerikkka is a dead-end. Let's leave while we can."

Brothers. Sisters. Elders. Artists. Churchgoers. Hustlers. Homeowners. The just-getting-by. Everyone pulled back from politics. Sure, a fraction will move overseas. The risk is that by abandoning political struggle, we let American fascism build momentum. If it does, the vast majority of us, who can't leave, will be attacked by a white-supremacist federal government. Even more than before. When the Trump administration implodes, it will take years to repair the damage.

We know this, but we are trapped in dreams of escape. Whether it's going full expat or retreating into personal life. Wherever we go, there is no real escape. First, we look in the mirror and ask a hard question: Did we cause this? Did our support for neoliberal Black Democrats lead us here? Second, our backs are against the wall. Millions of us can't just up and leave. We have to fight.

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN HAD WINGS

We dream of escape. We always have. At home, I stand at the bookcase. I can hear voices seeping from the pages. Slaves and freed echo across time. I take the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* off the shelf and flip to the folklore "All God's Children Had Wings." It tells of slaves brutally beaten until an African elder tells them in the past they could fly but lost the gift when they forgot their true language. When a pregnant woman is whipped, he tells her the lost words; she awakens and flies away. Eyes wide, her family repeats the words and flies, too. The Africans soared upward as the slave owner cursed and yelled.

Closing the book, I imagine this being told centuries ago, around a fire as a griot holds enslaved friends spellbound. The reflection of the flames dances in their eyes. When he's done, they go to sleep except a young woman who stares at her hands. The next day, she stops picking cotton and looks up, closes her eyes and recites new sounds. Wind rustles. An overseer shouts. A horse whinnies. She can't hear them as she stands on her tip-toes in the middle of the field, reaching for sky.

The dream of escape is part of us; it's part of our history and imagination. The where and how changes. During slavery, it was the Underground Railroad. After slavery, it was the Back to Africa Movement led by Marcus Garvey. Later, Rastafari called for a return to Zion. The Nation of Islam told us to return to our "true" religion. The Black Panther movies dazzled us with a beautiful two-hour dream of Wakanda, an escape into fantasy to feel, briefly, free.

And there was Obama. The brother's election as president was a seismic shift in our imagination. For a few years, some, not all but a lot of us shed the dream of escape for the American Dream. It is as if we no longer listened to the old griot saying remember your true selves. We painted the stars-n-stripes on our souls. We wore the mask as if it was our real face. We became as respectable as possible. We let go of revolutionary politics to be good Democrats.

Our folktale was replaced by the ancient Greek myth of Icarus. Daedalus and his son Icarus escaped from the king's prison. The father made them wings but warned his son not to fly near the sun, which of course he did. The wax holding his feathers melted. He plummeted into the sea. We, like Icarus, flew to the American Dream, bright and beautiful in the sky. We got closer and closer, then Trump got elected, twice, and we saw the truth. America is a big lie. We flapped our disintegrating wings. We fell. We are still falling.

QUIET QUITTING

"The street is not hot," I said to my friend. "Yep", she said, "We're done. We're doing mutual aid now, preparing for the recession. I mean this…" she waved at America. "Were' done. We. Are. Fucking. Done."

She is Black, an activist and healer. She says what's been said online, on the radio, on TV, on the stoop, on street corners, at barber shops and on the phone. Black America is quietly quitting politics. We haven't shown up at protests. We haven't been filling Black Twitter with our creative call-outs. We haven't really given a shit.

When the United States shifted rightward, we took a step back. Those who mused about life overseas are filing for visas to Canada, Mexico and West Africa. Those who can't leave are Netflix-vanishing into the strobe light of the screen. Those who love God are churching hard, shutting the doors to the outside world. A lot, just a lot, never cared to begin with unless someone they knew cared.

My friend and I say goodbye. Walking through the park, I see neighbors and, knowing Trump is coming for them, worry for their safety. Will my tatted Mexican homie at the bodega be deported without due process? Will the sick single mom whose son plays with my son lose her Medicaid? Will free food for the Section 8 families and schools be cut? Will kids go hungry? What about young activists handing out pamphlets about Israel's genocide of Gaza — will they be arrested?

Wherever I turn, everyone I know is going to be hurt by the new authoritarian regime.

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THE COLLAPSE OF LIBERAL BIG LAW

AND WHAT IT REVEALS ABOUT MODERN LIBERALISM

GARY MARTIN

By John Teufel

Whenever I tweet my anger at the deals large corporate law firms are making with Donald Trump, I get some variation of this response: "Did you really expect Big Law to have principles?"

It's a good question. By any measure, the massive, powerful law firms that collectively make up what lawyers and law students call "Big Law" are not moral organizations.

Trump wants to eviscerate law firms traditionally aligned with the Democratic Party. He struck on March 6 when he issued a blatantly unconstitutional executive order that would cut off the law firm Perkins Coie's ability to enter federal courthouses and represent their corporate clients. He then quickly issued similar orders against other law firms in his crosshairs. Rather than endure a bruising legal battle with a vengeful president, many of these powerhouse firms have cut deals with Trump.

Paul Weiss, the first firm to capitulate to Trump, has represented a who's-who of the companies making the world a worse place — Chevron, Goldman Sachs, BlackRock, Blackstone — and a hodgepodge of hedge funds. Pick out any Big Law firm, whichever political party to which it has pledged fealty, and you'll find a rogues' gallery of awful clients and destructive litigation. Little villainy can be accomplished without competent lawyering.

I wasn't sure, really, why the capitulation in the face of these firms, falling like dominoes right in a row, filled me with such rage. I'm, somewhat bizarrely, a lawyer myself, so at first, I thought it was like how a doctor might feel after reading about Mengele. Professional disappointment and the like. But I don't identify primarily as a lawyer or care much about law as a profession, so it probably wasn't that. There have been fascist lawyers before — even gay fascist lawyers, ticking off a second one of my identitarian boxes — and they never made me feel the level of rage I feel at Paul Weiss, Cadwalader, Latham & Watkins, and all the other firms bowing down to Trump.

After a few days sitting with this, I realized something. The Democrats, too, long ago ceased to disappoint me. I've been disabused of any notions of the Democratic Party's effectiveness or adherence to principle for years. Yet I still find myself perceptibly angered at their behavior under Trump, their flailing and triangulating and capitulating. What's going on here?

Perceiving my common reaction to the Democrats and Big Law opened my eyes. No, it's not that I thought highly of either of these institutions. It's that both of them, under Trump, abandoned the one last thing that was supposed to make them different: that, on some level, they were going to be a counterweight to fascism. Both had profited greatly from this tacit understanding. And it was all a lie, or more accurately, it was all branding. In the highest firmaments of society, there really is only bad, a big dark cloud of menace of which Trump is one molecule and anyone else with real power is another.

Paul Weiss has a long history of association with the Democrats. Former Obama Attorney General Loretta Lynch is a partner there, as is Chuck Schumer's brother. Paul Weiss leadership went all out for Kamala Harris, and another partner there helped Harris in her Trump debate prep. Paul Weiss represented Edith Windsor in her successful litigation against the Defense of Marriage Act, paving the way for same-sex marriage nationwide.

Stuff like this doesn't matter to you or me. But it matters to the law students who, every summer and fall, line up for on-campus interviews (colloquially, "OCI"), the process by which Big Law determines its summer associates and thus, its next class of attorneys. Those students — who have made it into and succeeded at the nation's top law schools — will leave OCI with a handful of offers. Their own personal politics will play into which offer they accept. A gay law student, a Democrat, a law student who may feel queasy about eventually helping Exxon Mobil extract more oil from the ground — they are all more likely to choose a firm that has a reputation for, well, successfully laundering their reputation. Paul Weiss represented Edie Windsor … How bad could the law firm really be?

The sad truth of Big Law — that it embraces a skin-deep version of liberalism easily tossed aside when profits are threatened — is the same sad truth of the Democratic Party. These are institutions that, at base, are primarily concerned with their own preservation. There are no larger principles here. There is a public image of inclusivity and pluralism fed to the masses, but when that public image becomes problematic, it is quickly discarded.

The Big Law firms that have cut deals with Trump are now rushing to cancel any DEI-adjacent programs they had in place. In one particularly cynical example, the law firm Skadden Arps — which agreed to provide $100 million worth of free legal services to Trump-supported causes and to create fellowships for law students to work on Trump-supported issues — has cancelled its "affinity groups," where lawyers of similar backgrounds (parents, Latinos, Black lawyers, etc.) could congregate and hold events. So much for pluralism.

As for the Democrats, they have rushed to throw trans people overboard, with the new governing ethos of the party being some variant of "act more like Trump." Democratic leadership has gone silent after enduring weeks of intense criticism for failing to stand up to Trump, including Chuck Schumer's shocking decision to support the Trump/MAGA budget. In the face of Trump's onslaught, Big Law and the Democrats have reacted the same way: with cowardice and appeasement instead of confrontation and bravery.

Yes, it's naive to think that something like "principles" exist for a law firm that makes billions of dollars a year. But that's what we were asked to believe, and a lot of people bought it. It was never a secret that these firms made their money by destroying the world. But the deal we were tacitly promised was that if the shit hit the fan and the fascists came for us, these firms would bravely stand against them. That has proven to be a lie.

I think that ultimately, we are seeing the failure of liberalism in the classic sense. Liberalism is less an ideology and more a shallow philosophical embrace of free markets and institutions. There's no moral center, nothing to cling to when the going gets tough. Without strong principles, you are kneeling in kente cloth one day and asking for more police funding the next — you are boasting about your reputation for diversity and then canceling your diversity fellowships. Big Law and Democrat liberals would rather preserve institutions than disrupt the onset of fascism. Say what you will about the far-right or the left, but they understand power dynamics and realize the tremendous stakes here.

Donald Trump is a stress test for institutions. Like a new roof in a pounding rainstorm, we're learning what holds up. Big Law has largely failed the test, and the Democrats are in the process of failing. If anything good comes of the Trump Administration, it will be that as the president lays waste to so much, he will also destroy the carefully crafted veneers of these ultimately hollow actors.

IS THIS A DICTATORSHIP?

By Amba Guerguerian & Milo Keogh

A flurry of executive orders has marked the first 100 days of Trump's second term, dismantling major parts of the federal government and firing thousands of federal employees, deporting thousands of immigrants labeled as "illegal aliens," attacking trans rights, and arresting and deporting student organizers. We've also seen repeated demonstrations of the administration's willingness to defy court rulings and the Constitution.

Coupled with Trump suggesting he may try to circumvent the Constitution to run for a third term, these developments have raised urgent questions about how far the President is willing to go to expand and retain his power.

The Indypendent recently spoke with parkgoers in Union Square to understand how Trump's actions are shaping public perceptions of his intentions — and the possibility of a dictatorship.

AMANDA
New York City

Do you think Trump is trying to become a dictator?

Yes. I would say I think he has personal gains in helping the billionaire class. He clearly is looking out for himself and for others. He doesn't really care who he steps on along the way in order to do that, and he's had a career of doing so, so I don't think it's that surprising.

Do you think he will try and run for a third term?

I think it's very possible. He's gotten farther than I ever could have imagined he would have already.

Is it affecting you or anyone you know?

So I'm half Ecuadorian. All of my cousins are now rushing to get married. All of their boyfriends are not citizens, and all of them are at risk of being sent back. One of them already has kids with my cousin, and their children already are in school in the U.S., and she's really concerned that the kids, who are five and three, are gonna grow up without a dad because he has had the most trouble. They came in under the Dreamer program, DACA, and that's been revoked, and now they're no longer seen as citizens. So yeah, it really worries me because my cousin does not know what to do about it. And these people are part of my family.

Fuck Trump. I've been saying that. I think we're getting to such a point — and I think this is on purpose — he's doing so much shit all the time that you almost don't even want to pay attention to it, and then he gets away with even more. So I guess, just keep reading.

JANE
Colorado; former New Yorker

Do you think Trump is trying to become a dictator?

I think he already thinks he's a dictator. I used to kind of think he's an idiot, but now I think he's an incredibly dark and terrifying human being.

What's interesting is I live in Colorado in a very politically purple place, and there are people all around me who voted for him without understanding what they were doing. In some cases, these are people I actually respect because of the way they live their lives on the land. They're forgotten and they're belittled, and they're just trying to survive, and they really thought it was a better choice.

Why do you think they voted for him?

I think everybody has an issue, whether it's freedom or cheaper gas or, I mean — I live with cattlemen and farmers and hippies and artists, and I think they didn't understand what he would do. It's that whole, "He's not going to deport my wife or my cousin," or, "He's not going to marginalize my LGBTQ sister."

People are so desperate for something they can hang on to. And he was clear, whereas the Democrats were like, "No, no, not that, not that," but weren't able to verbalize what an alternative would look like for them in their lives. That's my sense.

CARLOS
New York City

Do you think Trump is trying to become a dictator?

He already is, but it's less about Trump and more about the role of president, how it's always been essentially a dictator role. The existence of government is the issue. It's less about the individual and more about the control of individuals.

Trump is my favorite president specifically because he reveals the sham of the United Slave States of America. He is taking it to the absolute extreme. He is breaking the illusion at a faster pace than anyone.

So is President Trump a dictator? He certainly is, but he's the first one that is being honest about it. [Those in power] are feeding us garbage all the time, and he at least is screaming it honestly: "I'm stealing. I'm robbing you. I'm abusing you. I don't care about you." Because that's what this system is made to do. It's not made to care. It's made to profit. And the system is not broken. It's working directly as designed.

MICHAEL
New York City

Do you think Trump is trying to become a dictator?

Yes, I would think he's trying to certainly become an authoritarian ruler. He's taken several steps, among others, attempting to defy the judiciary and court orders. He's taken pretty arbitrary actions in terms of downsizing the government without any input. He's ignored the will of Congress. Congress has cooperated with him. The Republicans have, in any event.

Do you think there are any viable avenues to stop him?

Well, I'm hoping that the that the judiciary will do that to some degree. I'm hoping that as time goes on, the public will. And it seems to be now that polling is indicating that people are opposed to many of his policies. I'm hoping that public opinion will gradually shift against him, that perhaps the polling numbers — he's very sensitive to those — may influence him. Not wholly optimistic, but hopeful that that might happen, that more demonstrations will happen, that finally some Republicans will turn against him and express themselves in Congress to oppose some of his policies.

ZOHRAN

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Shawna Morlock, a DSA organizer in Mamdani's home district of Astoria, Queens.

AN AOC ENDORSEMENT?

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez made national headlines in April when she joined Bernie Sanders (I-VT) during their "Fighting Oligarchy" tour. Will she bring that same fighting spirit back to New York City, where Cuomo's campaign is bankrolled by real-estate and finance oligarchs? The safe strategy for AOC would be to issue a ranked-choice endorsement of Mamdani among other candidates and then keep her distance from the race to avoid being seen as taking a "loss" if Cuomo prevails. If she decides not to play it safe, she and Bernie could issue a ringing endorsement of Mamdani and stage a large campaign rally as early voting begins on June 14.

PROGRESSIVE UNITY

In 2021, progressives failed to take advantage of the city's ranked-choice voting system, which rewards coalition-building among like-minded candidates. This time, progressive groups led by the Working Families Party are emphasizing multi-candidate endorsements and have successfully coaxed their favored candidates to direct their attacks at Andrew Cuomo. Some of Mamdani's socialist allies have chafed at playing nice with other more moderate groups. But the benefit of keeping Cuomo under 50% as ranked-choice votes are tabulated is clear. If Mamdami initially finishes in the top two with Cuomo, a fifth-choice vote on an anti-Cuomo ballot is worth just as much as a first-choice vote from a passionate supporter.

THE DEBATES

Andrew Cuomo has been hiding from public view throughout his mayoral run. That should change on June 4 and 12 when Cuomo, who is receiving public matching funds, is mandated to participate in two televised mayoral debates. The first will be a multi-candidate affair. The second will only feature leading contenders which could by then just be Cuomo and Mamdani, who will be looking to close the sale with intrigued voters who will be assessing if he's ready for the job.

"In that space, Zohran will measure up and demonstrate to New Yorkers that he's ready for this," Epstein said.

MEDIA & THE MAYORAL RACE

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lications owned by Schneps.

As *Hell Gate* has documented, Victoria Schneps-Yunis, the company's figurehead, has close ties to Eric Adams. Her only four-figure political donation in the last 25 years was the $1,000 Schneps-Yunis gave to Adams in 2015. While the Schneps outlets did not endorse any mayoral candidate in the 2021 primary, many of the publications provided favorable coverage and/or a platform for Adams down the stretch.

amNY currently runs weekly op-eds from the mayor's team that are essentially press releases touting Adams' accomplishments. Many of these vapid columns end up running in other Schneps outlets. In early April, *Brooklyn Paper* yielded space to Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn, the Brooklyn Democratic Party boss who switched her support from Adams to Andrew Cuomo. Bichotte Hermelyn acknowledged that in 2021 she had called for Cuomo to resign amid the sexual harassment scandal, but defended what she characterized as her "nuanced approach" to it.

With Adams sitting out the primary, it seems likely that the Schneps outlets will lend de facto support to Cuomo. All have print editions, a format preferred by older voters, who are also Cuomo's base. Schneps-Yunis also shares Cuomo's hawkish views on Israel and hostility to the DSA wing of the Democratic Party. If Cuomo faces Adams in the general election, she will face a real quandary about which reactionary ally her outlets will favor.

Zohran Mamdani will continue to receive sympathetic coverage from the city's left-wing media, including *The Indypendent*, *Jacobin* and *The Nation*. His most influential supporter, however, will be the candidate himself — or more specifically, his campaign's manifest ability to create dynamic social media statements. Among the candidates in the June primary, Mamdani has no competition in terms of comms game.

No matter what happens in June, the shake-up in media control over New York City political campaigns is long overdue. The boomers are fading, and millennials are at the gates.

VETERANS

Continued from page 9

The VA health care system stands apart from the privately dominated healthcare system that most Americans experience. There are no monthly premiums, deductibles, co-pays or fees for almost all the services it provides. Conservatives have long sought to undermine this arrangement. Since 2011, the Koch Brothers funding network has poured more than $50 million into Concerned Veterans for America (CVA), which has become a leading player in the drive to privatize veterans' healthcare under the motto of "people-empowering solutions rooted in liberty-based principles." Its former executive director, Pete Hegseth — who now serves as Trump's defense secretary — was ousted in 2016 amid allegations of financial mismanagement and sexual harassment.

In 2018, *The Washington Post* described CVA as a "muscular force" in the push to privatize the VA, while CVA-related documents obtained by the investigative website American Oversight showed that a number of former CVA officials had moved into high-level positions in the Department of Veterans Affairs. In the first Trump administration, they managed to push more outsourcing of VA services that began at the end of the Obama Administration.

DOGE's sabotaging of the VA's ability to serve its clients closely resembles what is happening at the Social Security Administration and other public-facing agencies that the Trump Administration wants to privatize. "[They] take the battery out of the car, say the car doesn't work, then sell it off for parts," a longtime VA nurse commented at the April 9 rally.

"Hospitals are incredibly complex environments to work in," said Schnall, who was the head of quality management at Bellevue Hospital for 10 years. She worries that DOGE will force the layoff of many of the support workers — housekeepers, food preparers, radiology techs, pharma techs, the HR department that approves new hires, etc. — that make it possible for VA hospitals to function. "Politicians say they won't lay off doctors or nurses. But, if you make the working conditions so unpleasant, they will leave."

For Schnall, the privatization of the VA, if carried out, will inevitably fail veterans.

"The aim of private corporations is to make money for their stockholders," Schnall said. "You cannot do that and deliver any quality of care."

"WE'RE HERE, WE'RE QUEER, WE'RE UNIONIZED"

COURTESY

STRONGER TOGETHER: *"We're here, we're queer, we're unionizing," wrote Center Workers United in a caption on Instagram when the union posted this photo.*

By Eva Moschitto

Out of all the unions Alex Dinndorf has supported, unionizing The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center on West 13th Street in Manhattan marked a first.

"I'll be totally honest. I've never been voluntarily recognized [by management] before," Dinndorf told *The Indypendent*.

Still, he wasn't completely surprised. "Voluntary recognition is twofold: Management wants to work with the union, but also the workers signed a supermajority [of union authorization cards]," Dinndorf continued. "They would have won an election regardless."

Dinndorf is the organizing committee chair at CWA Local 1180, the New York City division of Communications Workers of America. According to a press release from the CWA, the new union, Center Workers United, will serve over 60 employees.

"I think this was a moment where management took an opportunity to trust their staff and to collaborate with us," said Salem Joseph, who has worked with youth at The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center (The Center) for over six years.

"I don't really know the motives behind The Center's voluntary recognition," said Silas Norum-Gross, an organizer who has worked as a substance-use treatment counselor at The Center for four years. "Is it adhering to values? Is it adhering to the mission? Is it in the interest of avoiding conflict? I don't know. But I do know that it was really great to not only be recognized, but to be seen," Norum-Gross added.

For non-profits, running anti-union campaigns can quickly backfire, Dinndorf explained: "Funding and public image … definitely play into it." Still, he said, "It's a sign of goodwill early on."

According to an email sent to staff, one of the reasons The Center's CEO Dr. Carla Smith opted to voluntarily recognize Center Workers United was the organizers' persistent hard work.

"The workers prepared for it. The workers have been building a union for a long time." Dinndorf said. "They did everything by the books."

Established in 1983 at the height of the AIDS epidemic, The Center now uses its $15.6 million annual budget to provide HIV, substance use, and other health services to queer New Yorkers, as well as career support, community groups and cultural programming. It also houses the LGBT Community Center National History Archive, the Keith Haring Bathrooms, and a cafe and patio that are open to the public.

Organizers with Center Workers United advocated for a variety of improvements in job security, salaries, safety measures for front-facing staff and health insurance, including greater provisions for individuals seeking gender-affirming care. While workers expressed gratitude for The Center's existing gender-affirming-care-related benefits, they noted that benefits could be expanded to serve newer employees.

After months of meeting, educating and organizing, Center Workers United marched on the boss, delivering a vision statement to management on March 13. "For too long, we have suffered short staffing, burdensome caseloads, minimal safety planning, a lack of opportunities for career growth, and low compensation," the statement read. "Fair working conditions allow The Center to retain skilled, experienced workers who are satisfied in and dedicated to their roles." The next day, Smith sent an email unofficially recognizing the union.

While unionization talks had stirred at The Center for years, it was a recent instance of solidarity at work that inspired employees to mobilize, Norum-Gross explained: In January 2024, 115 current and former Center employees signed a letter in solidarity with Palestine denouncing the ongoing genocide in Gaza and "Israel's use of pinkwashing as a racist and cynical ploy to divert attention from the relentless oppression of Palestinians."

"As civic leaders and proponents of human rights who live and pay taxes in the United States, we have an even greater moral responsibility to speak out and demand a ceasefire now," the letter states.

The letter also acknowledges that "since the October 7th attack, Islamophobia and antisemitism have been on the rise. We, as workers, are dedicated to making our community space a safer place for ALL impacted by this ongoing exposure to grief and loss. Our care is never meant to be exclusionary. As people who do not rely on binaries — this conversation is not binary either."

While some found the letter and the conversations it catalyzed "alienating," it was, for Norum-Gross, "a very unifying experience," demonstrating that "solidarity does make change, and change does, at least, create a conversation."

In the spring of 2024, several months after the letter was sent, workers at The Center reached out to EWOC, the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee, which connected them with CWA.

"CWA felt like the pick from the get-go," Norum-Gross said. CWA had helped unionize other nonprofits, including The Trevor Project. Plus, The Center's workers "met with some [CWA] representatives and just liked them," Norum-Gross said.

"CWA has a lot of resources," Dinndorf added. "It's a great union, and I'm really proud to be a part of it."

As unionizing efforts progressed, worker-organizers started holding weekly meetings to continue building community and "bonding over shared values."

They also wanted to make sure unionization was what their coworkers truly wanted.

Initial reactions to unionizing efforts were mixed. Some employees expressed hesitation, or, depending on their position, concern about losing their jobs. "I think people are just sort of activated when they hear the word 'union,'" Norum-Gross said, "but most people were receptive to at least hearing about it."

After workers learned more about unionization, "a lot of folks were drawn to the idea of having a seat at the table and creating a contract we can all stand behind," said Joseph.

That management recognized the union bodes well for contract negotiations, but changes in pay and working conditions won't be guaranteed until a first contract is negotiated between Center Workers United's bargaining team and The Center.

While Dinndorf declined to state when negotiations will begin, a worker bargaining committee has been elected, and he is excited for negotiations to start, saying "[voluntary recognition] is a really great step."

When asked how they might function differently now that The Center has unionized, Norum-Gross responded, "I just imagine a scenario where I have all my needs met [at work] and how much more present I can be in my job."

As the Trump administration tramples on queer peoples' civil rights and demands for crisis counseling continue to rise, The LBGTQ+ Center's services will only prove more critical.

Despite Trump's attempts to weaken the National Labor Review Board, similar unionization efforts are springing up. Workers at Garden State Equality, New Jersey's largest LGBTQ+ advocacy, education and wellness organization, announced their unionization campaign with Workers United NY/NJ on April 16.

"Decentralizing power in every way is the key to actualizing collective liberation for everyone," stated Reginald Webber Jr., a worker-organizer at Garden State Equality.

As Dinndorf said, "Lots of workers are overlooked … but they have incredible stories to tell."

FIGHT THE BULLY

Continued from page 10

billion endowment, is an unlikely ally, meet the bond market. Trump's "Liberation Day" announcement that he was imposing sky-high tariffs against almost every country in the world — as well as a couple of islands off the coast of Antarctica inhabited only by penguins — erased $6 trillion in stock-market value in less than a week. Trump still wouldn't budge on his tariff scheme. However, when the bond market began to crater as investors fled from the U.S. dollar, Trump was forced to reverse course and announce a 90-day "pause" on his most exorbitant tariffs, though not those against China.

- *Trump's mass firings of government workers, many of his executive orders and his administration's absurd interpretations of existing laws have repeatedly run into roadblocks in the federal courts, including from judges Trump appointed during his first term. Whether the Supreme Court holds the line against Trump and can compel him to abide by its decisions remains to be seen.*

- *In Canada, surging anti-Trump sentiment tanked the Conservative Party (aka Maple MAGA) in parliamentary elections it had led in the polls by more than 20 points. Similar results followed in Australia, where previously ascendent conservatives were routed in elections by the Labor Party. In his election night victory speech, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney declared, "President Trump is trying to break us so that America can own us. That will never happen."*

Out of a mixture of greed and spite, the second Trump administration has already done tremendous damage to the basic administrative functions of the government, to scientific research and to the United States' relationships with the rest of the world. We now find ourselves in a race against time to slow down and ultimately defeat Trump's authoritarian project before he and his favored tech broligarchs fully consolidate their control. There's no guarantee that "resistance" in its myriad forms will succeed. But think about how much more harm Trump and Musk would have been able to do by now if no one had said a peep.

As the consequences of the White House's actions start to be felt — shortages of basic consumer goods due to a 145% tariff on Chinese exports, rising inflation, a loss of governmental capacity to do everything from delivering Social Security checks to fighting wildfires — there's nowhere for the already unpopular Trump to go but down. The United States was born almost 250 years ago from a revolt against taxes imposed by an unpopular monarch. As we confront our would-be king, will another rebellion begin this summer if Walmart's shelves go empty and Amazon deliveries cease? Stay tuned.

ESCAPE

Continued from page 11

When I tell people about it, I get the we-survived-slavery-we'll-survive-this lecture. It drives me fucking mad.

Back home, I stop at the bookcase. I add what we say now to what the ancestors said. We want to escape America. They did too. Outside, children play in the yard. The contrast is that our ancestors made clear the freedom we demand is never meant for us. It is meant for those who are not born. The beautiful ones, the ones who will know how to fly.

TAKE THESE BROKEN WINGS

"No, I don't want no scrub," TLC sings from a passing car. "A scrub is a guy that can't get no love from me." The song echoed down the street.

My bestie and I watched the car turn as she pulled on a cigarette. We sat on the stoop. Her cinnamon tone, arrow-shaped face cracked an evil smile. "America can't get no love from me." She sang her version of TLC's hit. "Poor ass whites on the passenger side of a rich man's ride, waving the flag at me."

"Wow," I say. "Tell me how you really feel."

She held out her hands like double-pan scales. "You had Trump, an oafish buffoon," she said. "And a smart sistah — whatever her limits, she was up to the job. We're just a hundred days in, and this piece of shit president nearly destroys the world economy." She jabs her cigarette like a torch at a wild animal. "Racism. Sexism."

I've known her for years, and I see in her eyes the pieces of broken hope. She can't look at Trump and not feel pain. At times, it turns inward. She asks, "What else could we do? Don't we prop up the Democrats? Don't we do the work?" Other times, she lashes out. "So white people would rather destroy America than share it!" she will yell. "Fine, let it crash. When America is gone, then they'll know how it feels to be vulnerable."

I look at her in silence, weighing words. Vice President Kamala Harris' loss is an open wound. Some words are salt rubbed in.

"Yes, racism. Yes, sexism." I nodded. "I wanted to vote for Kamala Harris, but she was not on the ballot." She turned and stared a hole through me. "The real Kamala was replaced by a poll-tested, Republican-lite Kamala." I turned to her. "She chose to be a puppet. Why? Our political imagination is limited by what we think white people will accept. It's why we didn't fuck with Obama until he drew large white crowds. It's why our elders in South Carolina chose Biden over Bernie. And it's why Harris ran as a Republican-lite."

"That's not fair," she stubbed out the cigarette and pulled back her braids. She shook her head, no no no.

"The core the Black Freedom Struggle is democratic and communitarian," I lowered my voice. "We want freedom from fear and poverty, We want freedom from bigotry. We want the freedom to choose how to define freedom. And we want that for everyone else." I opened up my hands like flowers. "Maybe we need to support leaders who share our values."

"America isn't ready for that," she slapped her hands, ready to leave. "This country hates us. Always has. Always will."

I tried to say something, but she stepped down and walked away. The sun was setting, and long shadows filled the street. The slave folktale flashed in my head. Can we fly again? I watched her, and for a moment, I swear, her silhouette looked like bird with folded wings.

JOHN BERGER'S PROPHETIC VOICE

Hold Everthing Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance
By John Berger
Verso Books, 160 pages

By Eli Recht-Appel

When Verso Books first released John Berger's *Hold Everything Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance* anthology in 2007, George W. Bush was in his second term as President; the United States and the United Kingdom, Berger's native country, were embroiled in catastrophic wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and the Second Intifada in Palestine had recently come to a close.

Hold Everything Dear, reissued by Verso in March, has come off the bench in a moment when Berger's reflections on war, poverty, art, and language have only grown more resonant. "The visionary political vocabulary of three centuries has been garbaged," he writes in "Wanting Now," the opening essay. "The economic and military global tyranny of today has been established."

Throughout the 16 essays in the collection, Berger returns frequently to the notion that language is a casualty of our warped politics. In "Ten Dispatches About Endurance," he says the words democracy, liberty and productivity "have been rendered meaningless." However, this is not primarily a linguistic issue, but rather a political one. The loss of meaningful language obscures reality and justifies the unjustifiable.

In the 2003 essay "Let Us Think About Fear," Berger confronts how the Iraq War was sold to the American people. The claim that it was necessary to protect the United States from "weapons of mass destruction" turned out to be a cynical lie. And what did "liberating" the people of Iraq from Saddam Hussein look like? "Baghdad has fallen," Berger wrote shortly after the U.S. invasion. "The city has been taken by the troops who were bringing it freedom. Its hospitals are wailingly overcrowded with burnt and maimed civilians, many of them children, and all of them victims of the computerized missiles, shells, and bombs launched by the city's liberators."

That chasm between language and reality, "the ravine between declared principles and real aims," obscured both the atrocities of the war and the real motivations for the invasion. To Berger, those aims were to "seize control of one of the world's richest oil reserves, to test out new weapons," to enrich weapons manufacturers and war profiteers, and above all, "to demonstrate to the present fragmented but globalized world what 'Shock and Awe' is!"

Perhaps no topic covered in *Hold Everything Dear* is more resonant today than the several essays that discuss Israel and Palestine. Whether or not Berger — who died in 2017 in France, where he spent most of his life — could have anticipated Israel's transition to all-out colonial massacre as a response to the Hamas-led slaughter of Israeli civilians in October 2023, his analysis of the asymmetry of the so-called conflict is devastatingly pertinent today. "Any comparison between the weapons involved in these confrontations returns us to what poverty is about," he writes of the Second Intifada. "On one hand Apache and Cobra helicopters, F-16s, Abrams tanks, Humvee jeeps, electronic surveillance systems, tear gas; on the other hand catapults, slingshots, mobile telephones, badly used Kalashnikovs and mostly handmade explosives."

Berger admits that "a gap between declared principles and realpolitik may be a constant throughout history." However, he sees something new and disturbing about how the gap is constituted today, with "small words and evasive silence." Berger quotes an Israeli "refusenik," someone who has refused to serve in the Army, Sergio Yahni, on why the name "Israel Defense Forces" is a misnomer: "This army does not exist to bring security to the citizens of Israel: It exists to guarantee the continuation of the theft of Palestinian land."

In his closing essay, "Looking Carefully — Two Woman Photographers," Berger discusses the work of Ahlam Shibli, a Palestinian photographer of Bedouin descent, and Jitka Hanzlová, a Czech photographer who lives in Germany. Reading Berger's analysis of Shibli's work, which he says is concerned with "the impact of an event on a life," it is difficult not to think of the late Palestinian photojournalist Fatima Hassouna.

Hassouna was the subject of Iranian director Sepideh Farsi's documentary *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk*. The film, which chronicles the genocide in Gaza through video conversations between the two, was selected to debut at ACID, a parallel section of the Cannes film festival. On April 16, 24 hours after its selection was announced, Hassouna, who was in her mid-20s, was killed along with 10 members of her family by an Israeli airstrike on the Al-Touffah neighborhood of Gaza City. Hassouna would have gotten married just days after she was killed. Her 18-year-old brother described her as having "big dreams" and wanting "to travel and participate in international photography exhibitions." The young photographer saw her documentation of the genocide as a form of resistance. The Israeli government, as it often does, claimed the target of the strike that killed Hassouna and her family was a Hamas combatant but provided no evidence of such. Therein lies the gulf between claims and aims.

Berger, despite his constant recognition of the inhuman horrors of imperial war, reveals himself to have had a stubborn belief that human creativity and tenderness are inextinguishable — and it is instead the masters of war and capital who "are alone on this planet." He ends "Ten Dispatches on Endurance" with the sentence "Trace with a finger tonight her (his) hairline before sleep." "Another Side of Desire" concludes with "the sirens wail down the street. As long as you are in my arms, no harm will come to you."

This desire for tenderness might have something to do with Berger's frequent turns to the arts to develop an understanding of world politics. While he was a painter, a poet, a critic, and a storyteller, it's not so much that his only way of understanding politics was through the prism of art, but rather that there is something indispensable about what art can communicate, even under unspeakable conditions, about longing and survival.

It is in eulogizing his late friend Eqbal Ahmad, the Pakistani political scientist and activist, that Berger most potently brings all this together:

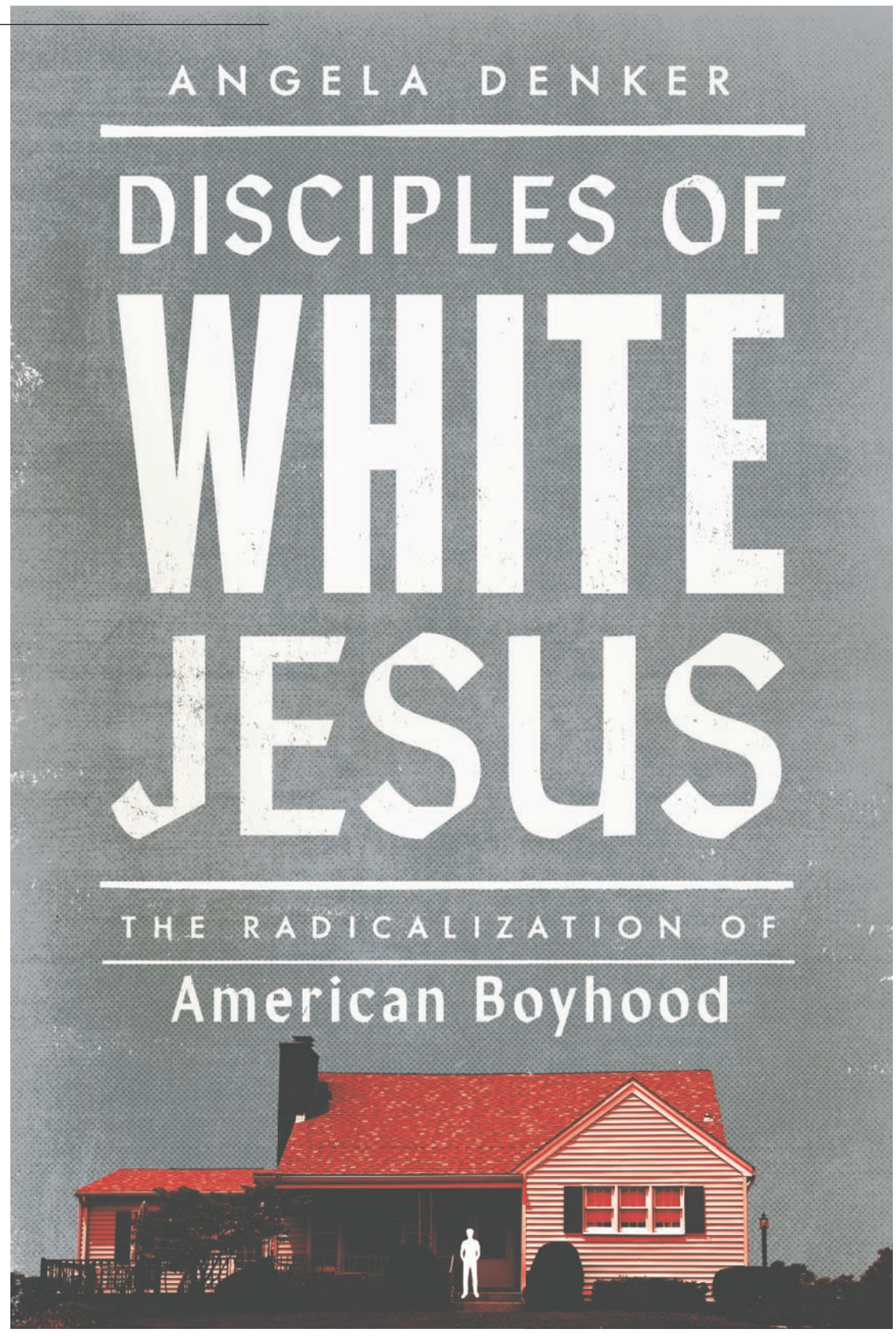
"Eqbal learnt early on that life inevitably leads to separations … . [He] knew and accepted the tragic. And, consequently, he spent much prodigious energy on forging links — of friendship, political solidarity, military loyalty, shared poetry, hospitality — links which had a chance of surviving after the inevitable separations. I still remember the meals he cooked."

Berger beckons us to forge links that may guide us through our tragic separations. And in his call to hold everything dear, he asks that no people — including those in Palestine and Iraq — be robbed of the right to sustain those bonds.

THE MARKETING OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Disciples of White Jesus: The Radicalization of American Boyhood
By Angela Denker
Broadleaf Books, 215 pages

By Eleanor J. Bader



Journalist and Lutheran pastor Angela Denker, herself the mother of sons, knows that boys can be affectionate, caring and sweet, but she also knows that they can be drawn to hate and violence. *Disciples of White Jesus: The Radicalization of American Boyhood*, Denker's second book, probes the ways Christian nationalism is marketed to them and exposes the misogyny, racism, homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia that are its stock and trade.

Denker offers a masterful critique of the ways Christianity has helped foment right-wing religious movements, zeroing in on the blonde, blue-eyed Christ that is seen in most U.S. and European churches. She then juxtaposes this image with a more realistic portrait of the "historical, brown-skinned, Middle Eastern, and Jewish Jesus." The result of this literal whitewashing, she writes, is a "progenitor of the Christian industrial complex that brought us megachurches and celebrity preachers and *New York Times* bestsellers and the prosperity gospel and Donald Trump."

Denker finds this appalling and effectively parses how these institutions manipulate language to appeal to young men; her depiction of the way hate is spread by well-dressed preachers, both in person and online, is chilling.

Moreover, her findings reinforce the conclusions of other researchers: Many young white males gravitate to the right because they feel disempowered by feminism, movements for racial equity, and the changing demographics that will make the United States a less white and less Christian nation within the next few decades.

Dylann Storm Roof, the 21-year-old white man who entered Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and prayed with congregants at Bible study before taking out a gun and killing eight Black parishioners and their pastor in 2015, is a case in point. Roof, of course, is neither anomalous nor unique. As Denker reports, white men are responsible for the lion's share of mass murders against Black people throughout the United States.

"Roof was radicalized online," Denker writes, "and he was an active reader of and visitor to sites like the Council of Conservative Citizens. … Roof mentioned the Council as part of his awakening in an unsigned 2,444-word manifesto on his website, which also included photos of himself taken with a self-timer at slavery-related sites across South Carolina."

Roof's evolution is fascinating, and Denker reveals that he not only lacked a "positive rooted identity" but struggled academically and socially. "He found his identity," she writes, "in hatred of others, and that identity of hatred festered and grew in social circles where people may have mentioned racism or prejudice but didn't confront it … preferring to avoid uncomfortable topics or introspection."

This sidestepping allowed Roof to cling to resentment and his presumed entitlement to an elevated place in a white, male-dominated Christian hierarchy. That this idea was supported by the right-wing Christian and white supremacist forums and websites he visited and videos he watched goes without saying. What's more, Roof saw this messaging as gospel truth and was elated by the sense of belonging he found in a host of online communities.

These communities also fed him a hefty helping of toxic masculinity; Denker notes that Christian nationalist speakers and written materials hammer visible shows of emotion as unmanly, as if vulnerability is a surefire "recipe for disaster, [causing] a potential upheaval in a society that has placed white Christian men at the top of a teetering house of cards."

For teetering men like Roof, it was easier, and likely more pleasant, to turn his fury toward people he felt were getting more than they deserved than it would have been to probe his disquiet and pain. It's a sad revelation and one that was repeatedly replayed in sites all over the country, from the Citadel Military College to the far-flung churches and youth ministries that Denker visited. Throughout, she found racism to be a linchpin that was reinforced by pervasive depictions of white Jesus, imagery that she argues leads believers to a reverential distortion. But there is an antidote: "Reminding young, white Christian boys and men that Jesus is not a white man forces them to take Jesus and put him into a seat often occupied by people who are oppressed and marginalized," she writes, "and whose strength and power are seen more often as a deviant threat than as something to be emulated and admired."

Despite many strengths, the book falters by not offering more than individualistic responses to the false depiction of the man Christians claim to revere. While one-to-one counseling and making a personal connection to boys who feel cast aside is essential, so too is confronting, opposing and organizing to stop the promotion of white male gender grievance, rivalry and white supremacy.

Denker wants all men and boys to learn to love and be open and respectful to both peers and strangers. It's a laudable goal, and while there are no ready-made strategies to get us there, it will clearly take all of us to make Christian nationalist messaging unappealing to viewers, listeners and readers.

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

RICHARD SWAFFORD

Dear Rev,
I keep being shocked at Trump. Seems like I go through my day doing double takes. I go to rallies and marches because it seems like then I'm inside one huge double-take and I'm spreading the work out a little…

Unravel this please,
BEVERLY

Dear Beverly,
Your daily Trump Shock — we are all repeating that double take, Beverly, as the comic evil just keeps coming. If it isn't invading Greenland, it's a secretary of Homeland Security who shoots puppies.

I have a suggestion for handling the shock and the sore neck from the disbelief. First of all, the double take is a very interesting dance move. Our bodies are so expressive. A double take is something that we can do. Being astonished twice in quick succession, with the second shock exaggerated.

As I often say, start your resistance to toxic culture by going to a favorite ecosystem — a meadow, an ocean shore, a forest…. Now notice how nature is full of double takes, especially songbirds, who seem to be doing double takes all day long. Think of that sudden wide-eyed jerk of the head that makes the robin seem to hear the worm under the grass.

In fact, if you gaze up into a forest, you will see a myriad of leaves looking this way and that in the wind. See eyes in the bark and the clouds. Yes, give the surreal Earth your wildest imagination. Keep seeing double takes! There is astonishment everywhere in nature: zigzags, jolts of surprise and wide eyes.

We are the hunted in the ecosystem of America, pulled from our homes, hand-cuffed anywhere. We do double takes galore. But if we are given the gift of our sensitivity to danger by the Earth that created us, then we quickly go beyond politics and don't have to dwell on the clown gangster who sadistically watches his victims cry. Beverly, take your Trump shock on a good, long hike.

We need to start the culture over. How we respond to a criminal government will be increasingly effective as we accept inspiration from the Earth. Finding human qualities in the Earth, like my playful example of the double take, needs to be reversed. We have the old colonizing habit of seeing ourselves in nature, holding up its mystery like a mirror. We need to listen to the Earth.

The Earth has its own language, intelligence and sense of justice. You don't have to give these qualities to the Earth, but the Earth might give them to you. We will have greater power over the murderers of the Earth if we know that the Earth is the original, full of genius and love.

Around the globe, we have record-breaking heat every month. We haul out the old worn and inaccurate words like "apocalypse." We try to find religious justice in the end of the world. That's a stall. A most ineffective dodge. The Earth can be astonished enough to stage the sixth extinction.

Beverly, the Earth is coming. And it will turn us upside down and inside out. Nothing will be the same. You can let the emergency erase your double take. Go talk to the trees and ask for your instructions. They say that the language of trees is spoken through the roots and carried through fungi filaments to the fellow loved trees, relatives and friends among the surrounding grove.

Try singing straight into the ground with your face pressed to the Earth. That's what I do. Let the roots be surprised at your interspecies song. Sing and talk and laugh. The tree above waves her branches in the wind. Maybe she isn't surprised. Maybe she knew this would happen.

Earthalujah!
BILLY

Theater for the New City
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THE GENERATOR SESSIONS
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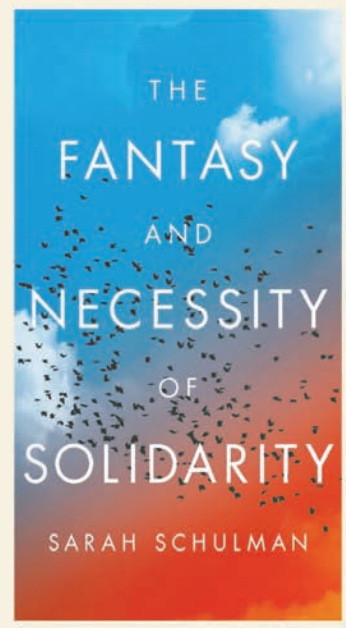

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